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ABSTRACT

In the fall quarter of 1988, a survey was sent to 20,047 students enrolled in North Carolina's 58 community colleges to gather information on student demographics by major, students' reliance on the community colleges as an avenue for furthering their education, the impact of commuting distance on attendance, patterns in college choice, the impact of various recruitment strategies, financial aid recipients and sources, students' employment status and future plans, transfer students' characteristics, and reasons for community college attendance. The study sought to update prior studies of community college students and detect changes in student profiles over the past 25 years. Usable questionnaires were received from 16,196 curriculum and continuing education students for an 81% response rate. Study findings included the following: (1) within the curriculum programs, female enrollments increased from 32% in 1968 to 62% in 1988; black enrollments increased steadily through 1979, then decreased by 4% between 1979 and 1988; the proportion of older students increased; and the enrollment of highly educated students increased; (2) the profile of continuing education students showed similar increases in female, minority, older student, and educated student enrollments; and (3) in comparison to the state's adult population as a whole, the community college student population included a disproportionately high number of females and whites, and a disproportionately low number of males, blacks, and adults with less than a high school education. Profiles of students by curriculum division are included. (PAA)

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# PROFILE OF STUDENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

A Paper Presented to the Council of Universities and Colleges

at the Annual Convention of the

American Association of Community and Junior Colleges

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by

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This project was conducted by the Department of Adult and Community College Education, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina, and sponsored by the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges and the State Board of Community Colleges with the full cooperation of all 58 community colleges in North Carolina.

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# INTRODUCTION

A major challenge facing faculty, administrators, and policymakers of community colleges is to maintain current and accurate information on student characteristics and to monitor changes over time. The purpose of this study of community college students enrolled in North Carolina's 58 community colleges was to develop an in-depth knowledge base on student characteristics to help administrators, faculty, and policymakers in their decisions impacting on students. The objectives were to:

1. Update and examine changes in student profiles over the past 25 years (Bolick, 1969; Phillips, 1970; Shearon, Templin, & Daniel, 1976; Shearon, Templin, Daniel, Hoffman, & West, 1980; Shearon, Brownlee, & Johnson, 1990).

2. Develop in-depth profiles on currently enrolled students in terms of demographic, socioeconomic, academic, and attendance characteristics, along with value orientations toward education.

3. Compare student profiles with the North Carolina adult population.

4. Analyze relationships between educational program areas and student characteristics.

The study examined annual reports from the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges and the previous studies cited in Objective 1. The 1990 study was a cross-sectional descriptive research design using a stratified systematic cluster sample design with an actual sample size of 20,047. During the fall quarter of 1988, 16,196 curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in all 58 North Carolina community colleges responded to a 50-item machine scorable questionnaire for an 81 percent response rate. Some of the major findings to 15 research questions are reported in this summary.

## WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CHANGES IN NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT PROFILES OVER THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS?

A primary objective of this research was to update prior studies of community college students for the purpose of detecting changes in student profiles during the past 25 years. This section presents a summary of changes in the curriculum and continuing education student profiles.

### Summary of Profile Changes in the Curriculum Student Population

Trend data since 1968 show interesting shifts in curriculum student enrollments. Over the past 20 years, female enrollments in the curriculum program area have significantly increased from 32 percent in 1968 to 62 percent in 1988. Likewise, male enrollments have steadily declined from 68 percent in 1968 to a current level of 38 percent.

Following a steady increase in black enrollments through 1979, there was a four percent decrease between 1979 and 1988. White enrollments increased slightly over the past nine years.

The North Carolina community college system is serving an increasingly diverse curriculum student population with regards to age. In 1968, three fourths of the curriculum students were 22 years of age or younger, compared to 39 percent in 1988. In 1988, 61 percent of the curriculum students were 23 years of age or older, and 39 percent were 30 years of age or older. Curriculum students are becoming older, however, there was a resurgence in the 17 and 18 year old students in 1988.

North Carolina community colleges are serving a more highly educated clientele. Over the last 20 years, there has been a trend toward declining curriculum

student enrollments among the educationally disadvantaged and correspondingly, a pattern toward increasing curriculum student enrollments among the educationally advantaged.

The percentage of curriculum students in technical programs has increased since 1968, while the percentages of vocational education students have decreased. The college-transfer program has increased from 11 percent in 1968 to 19 percent in 1988.

Summary of Profile Changes in the Continuing Education Student Population

The continuing education student data over the last twenty years present trends of both increasing and decreasing enrollments. Between 1969 and 1979, the female enrollments continually increased to a high proportion of 71 percent, while the male enrollments in that same period decreased to a low proportion of 29 percent. Within the last ten years, that trend has been reversed and the female enrollments have decreased to 65 percent as contrasted to the male enrollments which increased to 35 percent.

During the last twenty years the proportions of non-white students enrolled in continuing education programs have increased, from 20 percent in 1968 to a current level of 25 percent.

Continuing education students are becoming older. Within the 30 years of age or older age category, there has been a steady increase in enrollments. There was a slight increase in the 19 or younger age category from six percent in 1979 to nine percent in 1988.

During the last twenty years, the education level of continuing education students, as well as their parents, has increased, signifying a more highly educated student population.

## WHO ARE THE CURRICULUM AND CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENTS BEING SERVED BY NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

The profiles of curriculum and continuing education students are presented in this section. Representing a statistical averaging of student characteristics, these profiles may not reflect the true diversity of the students; however, they may suggest useful generalizations.

### The Typical Curriculum Student

The typical curriculum student is a 29-year-old, white single female who views herself or one of her parents as the head of the household. She is a high school graduate who may have one year of post-secondary experience. Her parents have completed high school or some post-secondary education. She works full-time, receives no financial aid, and is likely to have an income less than $25,000.

This student attends school part-time and is most likely to be enrolled in a technical program. She attends day classes on the community college's main campus, enrolling in one to three courses. This student travels ten miles or less to class making from two to five trips to class per week. The community college she attended was her preferred institution to attend. However, if that institution did not exist she would have attended elsewhere. Her primary graduation intention is to earn an associate degree in a career program.

Her major reasons for continuing her education are to earn more money and get a better job. She does plan to work in North Carolina.

The Typical Continuing Education Student

The typical continuing education student is a 44-year-old, white married female who lives with her spouse and children, and who considers herself or her spouse as the head of the household. She is a high school graduate whose parents probably did not graduate from high school. This student is likely to be employed full-time reporting a primary income of between $10,000 and $40,000.

This continuing education student is likely to be enrolled in the occupational program area, taking one course in the evening, at an off-campus site. Enrolled in her first or second quarter at this institution, she is likely to travel five or fewer miles to class making one or two trips a week. The community college she attended was her preferred institution to attend. If that institution did not exist she would not have attended another institution. Her primary education goal is for self-enrichment and she desires to complete selected courses, but does not intend to graduate. Her major reasons for continuing her education are to learn new things of interest and to earn more money.

## WHO ARE THE STUDENTS ENROLLING IN THE VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AREAS?

The profile of students in the four curriculum program areas (college-transfer, general education, technical education, and vocational education) and the five continuing education program areas (academic, preparatory, avocational and occupational education, practical skills) are presented in this section. These profiles represent a statistical averaging of student characteristics.

The College-Transfer Student

The typical college-transfer student is a 25-year-old, single white female who reports her father as the head of the household. She is likely to have had some post-secondary education and her parents are high school graduates. Employed either full or part-time, her 1987 income was likely to be less than $15,000.

This college transfer student is most likely to be enrolled part-time, attending classes in the morning on the main campus and enrolled in one to three courses per quarter. She is in her first or second quarter and travels ten miles or less to attend classes. She prefers to be enrolled in a public four-year college or university. Her primary education goal is to prepare for transfer to a four-year college.

Her major reasons for continuing her education are to earn more money and get a better job. She is likely to work in North Carolina.

The General Education Student

The typical general education student is a 33-year-old, single or married white female who designates herself or her spouse as head of the household. She is most likely to have attended a post-secondary education institution and her parents have completed high school and possibly have attended a post-secondary education institution. This student works full-time and her 1987 income is likely to be over $10,000.

A part-time student, she attends classes during the day on the main campus, enrolling in one or two courses. She may have been enrolled from one to three quarters and travels ten miles or less to class. She prefers to attend the local community college and her primary education goals are to prepare for transfer to a four-year college and for self-enrichment. Her major reasons for continuing her

education are to earn more money and learn more things of interest.

The Technical Student

The typical technical student is a 30-year-old single or married, white female who reports herself or her spouse as the head of household. She is a high school graduate who may have some post-secondary education. Employed full-time, she reports a 1987 income of more than $15,000.

This part-time student attends classes in the evening or morning on the main campus and is enrolled in one or two courses. Enrolled for one to three quarters, she travels ten miles or less to class. She prefers to attend the local community college and her primary education goals are to prepare for a different job or update/improve skills for a current job.

Her major reasons for continuing her education are to earn more money and get a better job. She plans to work in North Carolina.

The Vocational Student

The typical vocational student is a 30-year-old, white male who is likely to be single or married. He is head of the household, employed full-time, and reports a 1987 income of less than $25,000.

He is a high school graduate. A part-time student, he attends day classes on the main campus, enrolling for one or two courses. Enrolled for one or two quarters, he travels ten miles or less to class. He prefers to attend the local community college. His primary education goals are to prepare for a different job or update/improve skills for the current job and he intends to receive a diploma or certificate in a career program.

His major reasons for continuing his education were to earn more money and get a better job. He plans to work in North Carolina.

Academic Education Extension Student

The typical academic education extension student is a 53-year-old, married white female who lives with her spouse. She is likely to be the head of household, working full-time or having a retired status.

This academic education student is likely to have post-secondary education. She is enrolled in one course for self-enrichment that meets in the evening at an off-main-campus site. The course location is within five miles of the student's residence/place of work.

Preparatory Education Student

The typical preparatory education student is a 34-year-old, single non-white female. She may be the head of household, working full-time.

This student has less than an eleventh grade education. Enrolled in her first or second quarter at this institution, she is taking one course for the purpose of improving basic skills which meets during the day at an off-campus site. The course location is within five miles of the student's residence/place of work.

Avocational Education Student

The typical avocational education student is a 58-year-old, married white female who resides with spouse. Her spouse is likely to be the head of household, while she has a retired employment status.

The typical avocational education student has graduated from high school and may have some college. Enrolled for one course for self-enrichment which meets during the day at an off-campus site, she is likely to have been enrolled for more than five quarters at this institution. The course location is within five miles of the student's residence/place of work.

Occupational Education Student

The typical occupational education student is a 36-year-old, married white female who resides with spouse and/or children. She is likely to be the head of household and to be employed full-time.

Enrolled in her first or second quarter at this institution, she has graduated from high school and may have some college. She is enrolled for one course to update/improve skills for current job, which meets in the evening probably on the main campus. The course location is within ten miles of the student's residence/place of work.

Practical Skills Education Student

The practical skills education student is a 62-year-old, married white female who resides with her spouse. She is the head of household and retired.

This student has graduated from high school and may have some college. Likely to have been enrolled for more than five quarters at this institution, she is enrolled in one course for self-enrichment which meets during the day at an off-campus site. The course location is within ten miles of the student's residence/place of work.

## ARE THE STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ADULT POPULATION OF NORTH CAROLINA?

This section provides a summary response regarding the extent to which community college students are representative of the North Carolina adult population. The study findings reveal that curriculum and continuing education programs serve disproportionate numbers of females and males. In comparison to the adult population, women were over-represented and men under-represented in both student groups.

In terms of race, both curriculum and continuing education students were approximately representative of a cross-section of the state's adult population, with the exception of black curriculum students who were under-represented.

Curriculum students were not representative of the adult population in terms of age--older adults were under-represented in these programs while younger students were over-represented. Continuing education enrollments were representative of all major age groupings in the state's adult population.

Adults with less than a high school education were under-represented in the curriculum program area, while high school graduates and students with one to three years of post-secondary education were over-represented. Within the continuing education program area, students appear to mirror the education levels of the adult population.

The most over-represented occupational category among curriculum and continuing education students was executive/professional/specialty/technicians. Under-represented in both student groups were the occupational categories of sales/administrative support and operators/fabricators/laborers.

## WHO ARE THE ADULTS NOT BEING SERVED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM?

When compared to the proportions in the projected 1988 North Carolina adult population, adults 40 years of age or older were under-represented among curriculum students. However, the 40-49 age category and the 50-59 age category of curriculum students showed gains in representation over the 1979 levels. Within the 60-69 age category and the 70 or older age category, the adult population increased at a faster rate than the curriculum student enrollment.

In the curriculum and continuing education program areas, females were over-represented and males were under-represented. From a representative proportion in 1979, male curriculum enrollments have decreased to the under-represented level. While under-represented in the continuing education program area, males have made gains in representation between 1979 and 1988.

Black adults are under-represented in the curriculum programs. This represents a decline in representation of 5 percent between 1979 and 1988.

In the curriculum program area, students at the lowest educational levels--eighth grade or less and some high school and the highest educational level--college graduate or more are under-represented. Continuing education students with an eighth grade or less educational level are under-represented.

Among curriculum students, the sales/administrative support, operators/fabricators/laborers, and service occupational categories are under-represented. Among continuing education students these two occupational categories are under-represented: sales/administrative support and operators/fabricators/laborers.

## WHICH STUDENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AREAS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION IN THE ABSENCE OF NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

Curriculum students as compared to continuing education students were more likely to have continued their education had the institution in which they were enrolled not existed. Among curriculum students, those most likely to seek educational opportunity elsewhere were college-transfer and technical students.

The majority of continuing education students indicated they would not attend another institution. Of those who responded they would attend elsewhere, the largest proportions were in occupational and preparatory program areas.

## WHICH STUDENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AREAS ARE LEAST LIKELY TO ATTEND A NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS THE DISTANCE TO CLASS INCREASES?

Seventy-three percent of the curriculum students traveled 15 or fewer miles one way to class, with 62 percent reporting they made more than two trips to class each week. Within the four curriculum programs, the estimated proportions of students who traveled various distances was similar. The lowest proportion of curriculum students who traveled distances greater than 15 miles was in the general education program.

Seventy-two percent of the continuing education students traveled ten or fewer miles one way to class; 79 percent reported they made one or two trips to class each week. Academic education (61 percent), preparatory education (65 percent), and

avocational (53 percent) students traveled five miles or less to attend classes.

## WHICH STUDENTS SELECTED NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES AS THEIR FIRST CHOICE OVER OTHER FORMS OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION?

Curriculum and continuing education students cited their first preference of institution to attend was the community college they were currently attending. As their second choice, curriculum students ranked a public four-year college/university, whereas continuing education students selected another community college.

Among the curriculum programs, all program areas except college-transfer selected the community college they were presently attending as the first preference of institution to attend. College-transfer students selected a public four-year college or university as their first choice.

Twenty-four percent of the curriculum and continuing education students enrolled in the North Carolina Community College System had been enrolled in a degree program at a four-year college or university. This reflects a one percent increase over the 1979 level of students who had previous enrollment in a four-year college.

## WHAT RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES INFLUENCED STUDENTS TO ATTEND NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND WHERE DID THEY GET THE FIRST INFORMATION ABOUT PROGRAMS?

The first and second sources that influenced the student's decision to attend

his/her institution differed according to program area. Among curriculum students, the first sources were family members or friends while the second sources cited were institutional factors--recruiter, literature, and media. Among continuing education students, institutional factors were the first sources, followed by family members and friends.

In the four curriculum program areas, parents were cited as the primary source of most influence to attend. The institutional factors of recruiter and literature were primary influential sources in all continuing education program areas except occupational education. Employers were the most influential source for occupational education students.

Institutional factors--recruiter or other staff, literature, and media were the primary sources of first information about the program for curriculum and continuing education students. Among the institutional factors, the largest proportions of curriculum and continuing education students reported literature from the college as a key source of information, followed by college personnel.

## WHICH CURRICULUM STUDENTS ARE RECEIVING FINANCIAL AID AND WHAT IS THE SOURCE AND AMOUNT OF THAT AID?

The majority of curriculum students did not receive financial aid. Of the 23 percent who received financial aid, the largest proportions of curriculum students were in the technical and vocational education programs.

Employer tuition assistance and Pell Grants were the principal sources of financial aid for all curriculum respondents except the general education students. Veterans Administration educational benefits were the primary source of financial aid for general education students. Of the 23 percent of curriculum students who received financial aid, the largest proportion received under $700.

## WHAT IS THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF STUDENTS?

The majority of curriculum and continuing education students were employed. Slightly less than one half of all students in both groups were employed full-time. A majority of all students were working 30 hours or more per week.

Among curriculum students, full-time employment was greatest among technical and vocational education students, and least among college-transfer students. In the continuing education program areas, the largest proportion of full-time employed students was in occupational education. The retired status accounted for the majority of practical skills students.

## WHO ARE THE STUDENTS PLANNING TO OBTAIN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AND WHO HOLDS THE DEGREE?

A large proportion (28 percent) of the curriculum students indicated that the highest level of education they planned to obtain was the bachelor's degree. College-transfer students were the most likely to plan for a bachelor's degree followed by general education students. Only ten percent of the continuing education students indicated any plans to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Among curriculum students, the highest proportions of students who reported prior enrollment in a four-year college/university were in the general education program area followed by college-transfer and technical education. Twenty-two percent of general education students reported they already held the baccalaureate, while 16 percent of all continuing education students held the degree. This indicates that a sizable number of adults are enrolling in North Carolina Community College System institutions to pursue special interests and for retraining.

## WHAT ARE THE STUDENT'S EMPLOYMENT PLANS AFTER COMPLETING THEIR COURSE OF STUDY?

A majority (77 percent) of the curriculum students indicated that they planned to work in the area the college served or someplace in North Carolina, as compared to 52 percent of the continuing education students. Among curriculum students, more of the technical and vocational students plan to work in the local area served by the college. In the continuing education program area, the largest proportion of students planning to work in the area are occupational and preparatory education students.

## WHAT ARE THE MAJOR REASONS STUDENTS CITED FOR ATTENDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

Curriculum students gave "to be able to earn more money" and "to get a better job" as their two top reasons for continuing their education. Continuing education students ranked "to learn more things of interest" and "to be able to earn more money" as their two top reasons. These findings show a reasonable balance between the vocational-monetary and improvement-learning orientations of students. The North Carolina Community College System has maintained over the last 25 years a stated emphasis on technical, vocational, and occupational programs. Seventy-four percent of the curriculum students are enrolled in technical and vocational programs, while 38 percent of all continuing education students are in the occupational program area.

## WHAT ARE THE INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT INFLUENCED STUDENTS TO ATTEND NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGES?

Student rankings of institutional characteristics that most influenced their decision showed no differences between curriculum and continuing education students. Students in both curriculum and continuing education programs reported the following five influencing factors: (1) educational programs or courses available; (2) location of classes; (3) low cost; (4) convenient class schedule; and (5) quality of instruction.

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